



1. Main characteristics

It has both a **main plot** and a **subplot**:

- the **main plot** → the dispute on money matters between the Venetian Antonio and the Jewish money-lender Shylock;
- the **subplot** → the choice of a husband by the rich lady Portia, who lives in Belmont.

It's **classified as a comedy**

but is Shakespeare's **most controversial play**.



2. The settings: Venice

- In the 16th century **Venice** was an **autonomous trading town**.
- The English saw it as a symbol of **wealth**, but it was also associated with **greed**.
- **Jews** were forced to wear a **red hat** to identify themselves and lived in the **ghetto**.



2. The settings: Venice

The two views of Venice are expressed through:

- **Shylock**, the Jew who symbolises **the greedy side**;
- **Antonio**, the rich but generous Christian merchant, who stands for **the wealth of Venice**.

The town had **strict laws** and was a world largely **dominated by men**.



2. The settings: Belmont

- An idyllic place where a **rich**, **happy** and **sophisticated** society lives. A fairy-tale world of music and love.
- Young people there play tricks on each other, **wit** and **humour** are part of their daily life.
- **Women** seem to have more power than men.



3. Jews in Elizabethan England

- **1290 Edict of Expulsion** → Jews had been banned from England;
- **excluded** from many fields of work;
- **moneylending** → common occupation among the Jews;
- Shakespeare drew on **anti-Semitism** and common stereotypes.



4. The main characters

SHYLOCK → a Jewish moneylender

*'The slaves are ours.' So do I answer you.
The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought. 'Tis mine, and I will have it*
(Act IV, Scene I, vv. 89–99)



Al Pacino as Shylock in Michael Radford's
The Merchant of Venice (2004).



4. The main characters

SHYLOCK → a complex character

His humanity: his hatred of the Christians arises from the mistreatment and abuse he suffered in a Christian society.

His lack of mercy for Antonio prevents us from considering him in a completely positive light.



Al Pacino as Shylock in Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (2004).



4. The main characters

SHYLOCK → his humanity

- He has a **daughter** who deserts him;
- he had a beloved **wife** who is dead;
- he belongs to a '**sacred nation**' and a 'tribe';
- he lives in a society that despises him;
- at the end of the trial he is deprived of his identity as a Jew;
- his enforced conversion finalises his exclusion, isolating him from his community.



4. The main characters

PORTIA

- A **wealthy heiress** from Belmont, whose beauty is matched only by her intelligence;
- bound by her father to the casket test to get a husband.

The quality of mercy is not strained.

*It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath*

(Act IV, Scene I, vv. 179–181)

Lynn Collins as Portia in Micheal Radford's
The Merchant of Venice (2004).





4. The main characters

ANTONIO

- The **merchant** who signs Shylock's contract to help his friend Bassanio.
- He **lends money free of interest**, and risks his wealth and reputation for his friend.

Jeremy Irons as Antonio in Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (2004).

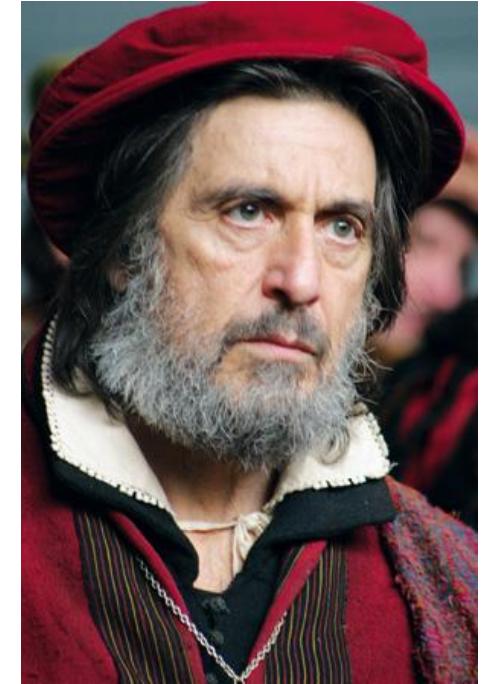




6. Themes

Various **types of love**:

- the love of a friend;
- the love of children for their parents;
- romantic love;
- love for money and possessions.

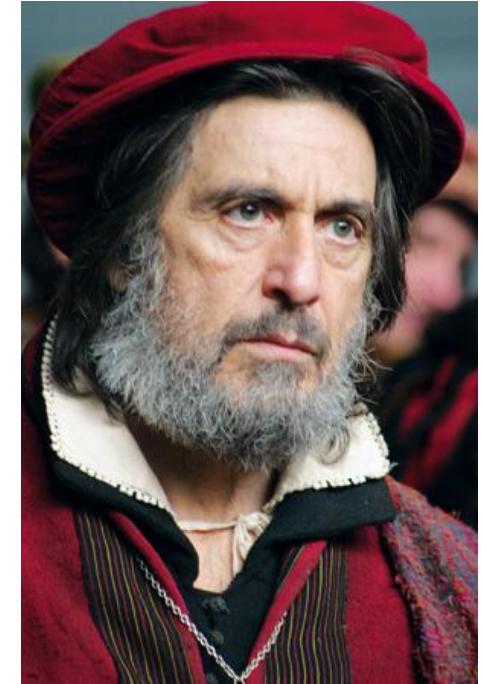


Al Pacino as Shylock in Micheal Radford's
The Merchant of Venice (2004).



6. Themes

- Jews vs Christians.
- Hatred and prejudice.
- Mercy, justice and revenge.
- Appearance and reality.
- Value and worth.



Al Pacino as Shylock in Micheal Radford's
The Merchant of Venice (2004).